

COLLECTION OVERVIEW

HEBRAICA AND JUDAICA STUDIES

I. SCOPE

The collections in the custody of the Hebraic Section include materials in Hebrew and related languages (such as Yiddish, Ladino, Judeo-Persian, and Judeo-Arabic) on a wide-variety of subjects, as well as a collection of Amharic and Tygrina materials from and about Ethiopia. In addition to these substantive collections, the Library of Congress holds one of the world's most important collections of Judaic materials in all languages and formats that document Israel as well as Jewish civilization across time and around the world.

II. SIZE

While difficult to give an accurate piece count, it is estimated that the Hebraic collections number approximately 180,000 volumes, most of which are in Hebrew. The collections include an extensive range of monographs; a broad selection of Hebrew and Yiddish periodicals--current and retrospective, popular as well as scholarly; and a variety of Yiddish, Hebrew, and Amharic newspapers. The Judaic collections have been variously estimated as numbering between 350,000 to 500,000 additional items and are housed in appropriate custodial divisions throughout the Library. In addition to books and journals, these materials include newspapers, motion pictures, music, sound recordings, prints, photographs, rare books, manuscripts, and maps.

In 2002 the Library acquired the Thomas Kane library of materials about Ethiopia. The collection includes 200 Ethiopian manuscripts, some 2,500 works in Amharic, Tigrinya, Ge'ez and other Ethiopian languages, and more than 3,500 titles in English and other European languages.

III. GENERAL RESEARCH STRENGTHS

The Library of Congress holds comprehensive Judaic and Hebraic collections. Its holdings are especially noteworthy in the areas of the Bible and rabbinics, liturgy, Hebrew language and literature, responsa, Jewish history, and the history, politics, and sociology of Israel. Unique to the Library are Judaica and Hebraica items acquired through U.S. copyright deposit. The section's reference collection encompasses virtually all pertinent encyclopedias, indexes, and bibliographies. Of particular interest to genealogists is the Library's comprehensive collection of Holocaust memorial volumes documenting Jewish life in Eastern Europe before the Second World War, as well as a large collection of rabbinic bio-bibliographical works

in Hebrew. The section houses an extensive collection of Israeli government documents and includes virtually complete sets of official statistical abstracts critical for social science research on Israel. The collection is enhanced through microform holdings of thousands of Hebraica titles including manuscripts, books, and journals not otherwise held by the Library.

IV. ELECTRONIC RESOURCES

In recent years, the development of a wide variety of electronic resources has provided new access points to the Library's collections of Judaica and Hebraica. Treasures from the Hebraic section that have been digitized and made freely available on the African & Middle Eastern Division's website include the fifteenth-century Washington Haggadah manuscript and the Kirkor Minassian Cuneiform Tablet Collection consisting of thirty-eight cuneiform tablets, cones and brick fragments dating back 4,000 years. Seventy-seven Yiddish American plays received through copyright deposit appear on the Library's American Memory website under the section on "American Variety Stage: Vaudeville and Popular Entertainment, 1870-1920."

A finding aid for the entire collection of more than 1,000 play scripts, "The Lawrence Marwick Collection of Copyrighted Yiddish Plays," is also available online on the AMED web site.

Several illuminated Jewish marriage documents from the Hebraic section collections are mounted at the National Library of Israel website.

Researching American Jewish women at the Library can be facilitated through the print and electronic versions of American Women: A Library of Congress Guide for the Study of Women's History and Culture in the United States.

Versions of exhibits created by the Hebraic section are now available online. Two examples include "Scrolls From the Dead Sea," and "From Haven to Home: 350 Years of Jewish Life in America."

The Myron M. Weinstein Memorial Lecture on the Hebraic Book, an endowed lecture series, was established after the death of Myron Weinstein (1927-1998), a former Head of the Hebraic Section. Several of these annual lectures have been web cast and can be viewed from the Library's homepage.

The Library subscribes to a multitude of electronic resources, databases, ejournals, and electronic reference books that facilitate both general and specialized research in Judaic and Hebraic studies. Subscriptions to the electronic version of the second edition of the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* and to the *Index to Hebrew Periodicals* are but two examples.

V. AREAS OF DISTINCTION

Housed among the 2,000 rarities in the special collections of the section are cuneiform tablets, manuscripts, incunables, decorated Jewish marriage documents, micrographies, miniature books, amulets, and the section's most noteworthy treasure: *The Washington Haggadah*, the fifteenth-century illuminated Hebrew manuscript copied by Joel ben Simeon. The more than two-hundred Hebrew manuscripts held in the section include a translation of the Koran into Hebrew, various responsa of the rabbis, an 18th-century decorated *Scroll of Esther*, and an early Ethiopian Psalter in Ge'ez. The Hebrew manuscripts are currently being preserved through a microfilm project. A finding aid has been completed and may be consulted in the African and Middle Eastern Division Reading Room. The section's treasures include examples from among the first books printed in Spain, Portugal, Turkey, Italy, and the African continent. With 24 Hebrew incunables housed in the section, and an additional 15 in the Rare Book and Special Collections Division, the Library of Congress ranks as one of the world's most important public collections of Hebrew incunables--books printed before 1501. Dispersed throughout the Library of Congress' special collections are such Judaic treasures as letters from Presidents Washington, Madison, Jefferson, and Lincoln (among others) to prominent American Jewish leaders of their times; music composed by Leonard Bernstein, the Gershwins, Irving Berlin, and Arnold Schoenberg; and papers and manuscripts of Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud.

VI. WEAKNESSES/EXCLUSIONS

There are some gaps in holdings of retrospective Hebrew and Yiddish newspapers and serials, especially from European countries. The book trade in Israel is very well established and prolific, and even with the Library's extensive exchange program with other institutions not all publications can be acquired. It is difficult to identify ultra-Orthodox Israeli publications since they are not always available in the general marketplace. The Library is attempting to acquire the materials published by the recent Russian and Ethiopian immigrant communities in Israel in their vernaculars. In recent years, the Library in general has not collected foreign juvenile literature, except for selective titles, and Israel is a major publisher of children's books. The Library's collection of Israeli films, DVDs, and videos is also not as comprehensive as it could be, partly as a result of the mushrooming cultural creativity of the populace.